



# THE FLY LEAF

PUBLISHED BY THE  
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FONDREN LIBRARY  
AT RICE UNIVERSITY  
HOUSTON, TEXAS



## THE FLYLEAF

Vol. XVIII, No. 4

Quarterly  
July 1968

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### OPPORTUNITIES FOR FRIENDS

The Library has the opportunity at this time to purchase two collections which would materially strengthen it as a research institution. Friends of the Fondren Library are invited to contribute all or part of the necessary purchase price, noting that such gifts are tax deductible, gratefully appreciated, and signalized by appropriate book plates and other acknowledgments:

1. A collection of 30 books, 34 letters, and over 40 pamphlets, essays, and other items by or about the late Claude Houghton (Oldfield), a too-little-known English writer active during the past four decades. The library already possesses a number of his books and manuscripts, and the whole would constitute a collection valuable for research and of great interest to the thoughtful reader. Amount needed: \$500.00.

II. A splendid private library of several thousand books and many pamphlets, cartoons, letters, and other manuscript items, relative to Austro-Hungarian history, politics, the fine arts, and literature. The History Department, under the chairmanship of Dr. John Rath, has moved during the past five years to a prominent position among American universities in Austrian and Eastern European studies.

The leading journal in the field, the Austrian History Yearbook, is published at Rice, and many exchanges with eastern European institutions are maintained by the Fondren.

Three large collections have already been purchased, and the present collection, if acquired, will give Rice and its library a position of national importance and even leadership in the field of Austrian and related studies. Amount needed: \$36,000.00.

H. C.

## LITERARY FORGERS -- NEW AND OLD

by

Alan D. McKillop

Trustee Distinguished Professor of English

An address presented under the sponsorship of the  
Association of Rice Alumni in Hamman Hall on  
October 12, 1967

I am deeply appreciative of the honor paid me by the Alumni Association in inviting me to deliver this lecture, but the choice of a subject has given me some difficulty. Being uncertain about my ability to say anything very novel or profound about the universe at large, I have decided to talk shop with you a little, though not, I hope, in an oppressively technical way. In choosing "literary forgers" as my subject, I have undertaken to deal with different kinds of deception or pretense. These deceptions are not of the first order of importance; that is, they will not overthrow our society or threaten the future of the human race. As compared with the bomb and the actualities of mass aggression these literary misdemeanors may furnish some relatively harmless diversion, may even serve as a gentle sedative. And I trust my little band of wrongdoers will gain a tolerant and even at times a sympathetic hearing from this kindly audience.

Within a broad and vaguely defined area I am going to illustrate briefly two kinds of deception: one is the production of spurious literary texts, the other the production of various spurious records, other than the texts, bearing on literary history or on the lives of famous men. In the latter group a particularly prominent form is the alleged autograph letter. I shall not deal with the corruption of texts, with plagiarism, or with problems of attribution as such. The

words forger and forgery are really inadequate to describe the field. There are broader terms, some of them not so harsh -- mystification, hoax, fabrication, pretense. If we could we should like to make distinctions here according to the motives of the fabricator. Was he moved by an urgent curiosity to see whether he could get away with it? Did it simply give him a sense of superiority to deceive people? Was it delight in his own technical skill? Presumably he wanted money, and most literary fakes have been offered for sale, but in the literary field (I do not speak here of the fine arts) the trouble the forger takes often seems out of all proportion to his gains. In probing human actions, however, we are sometimes baffled by the absence of any plausible motive, and find that we are dealing with what seems to be a purely gratuitous act, so that we come out at the end with a few unenlightening comments on human perversity.

One distinction can be offered at this point, though it may seem to be too obvious to be useful. In forgery in the legal sense there is always a document which is produced and challenged -- the check, the deed, the will. In what we loosely call literary forgery there may or may not be a questioned document actually produced, though its existence is always alleged. Thus it seems that a certain William Combe was mainly responsible for the troublesome Original Letters of the Late Rev. Laurence Sterne, but the case has to be argued without benefit of alleged actual original manuscripts. When a document is produced, it is subject to a battery of tests, some of which would carry us beyond the limit of this discussion. That is, I do not propose to discuss all the niceties of detection, of which I have no special knowledge. But at any rate the document must be challenged; it exposes itself only in extreme cases. Take a case which may be called an all-time record in human gullibility: from 1861 to 1869 a certain Vrain-lucas sold to a mathematician named Chasles 27,320 forged letters, 1000 from Pascal, 3000 from Galileo, others from Cleopatra, Alexander the Great, Lazarus, etc., all written in French. This is an instance of

sheer naïveté and credulity rather than forgery in the usual sense; a challenge is hardly necessary, and the fraud is too obvious to be interesting; the claim refutes itself. Almost always the fraud is less extreme. Let me cite a more routine example. About forty years ago an English dealer offered for sale a supposed autograph letter of Oliver Goldsmith. Goldsmith, so the letter goes, has just got back from his travels on the Continent, and is writing promptly from a London coffee-house to his old college friend Edmund Burke, whom he wants to see at once. Now the contents alone make this letter suspect. It puts too many significant things in one small package, somewhat as an historical novelist might do; we have an important part of Goldsmith's career in a nutshell, and a big name -- Edmund Burke. In forged letters the writer often says something very important, and meets the best people. In genuine letters, as every editor knows, the writer is likely to mention some person you have never heard of before, and seems disposed to avoid mentioning the important matter you would like to have him discuss. With further reference to this letter, we find that though Goldsmith and Burke were contemporaries at Trinity College Dublin, there is no confirming evidence that they were acquainted at that period. Moreover, in this letter Goldsmith says that he has just returned to his native country -- an awkward touch, since he was born in Ireland. Professor Tinker of Yale immediately pronounced the item a forgery, and added that he had seen other Goldsmith forgeries by the same ready writer.

The literary forger's position is strongest when he adds a relatively inconspicuous item to a large and complex body of material, but the impulse to produce something important works the other way. A forged autograph letter of Shakespeare's would make the front page, but wouldn't get by for long. There is a short and blissful moment, however, when the fact that the forgery involves a famous subject may increase the eagerness of the victim. This was brought home to the reading public at the end of 1928, when the "Minor Collection" hoax shook the editorial offices of the Atlantic Monthly.



An incredibly rich collection of Lincoln autograph letters and annotated books was brought to the Atlantic and was naturally subjected to the usual tests. The paper would of course be right; any competent forger would see to that. Other tests must have been very superficially applied. The editor then authorized the publication of some of the new material under such titles as "Lincoln the Lover," "The Courtship," "The Tragedy" -- fabricated documents which were completely discredited by April 1929. What happened here was that the tests were not really applied in an objective way; there was a subconscious will to believe. The editor thought he was guarding himself by reporting that at first he had said to himself, "This is too good to believe," but these very words gave him private license to believe. This is a common pattern; when a man says, "I don't want to be unreasonable," the chances are that he is going to be unreasonable. To come back to the Minor Collection, the fabricator put in what was most wanted: let Lincoln tell his friend John Calhoun how he loves his mother, and let him pour out his heart to Ann Rutledge. I mention this hoax chiefly to show how intense interest in a subject can at once float and speedily discredit a fabrication. With all that is known about Lincoln, the Minor Collection was reduced to mincemeat virtually overnight.

Let me cite another instance in which the forger worked much more successfully over a longer period of time. In some respects the most remarkable literary forger known to me is a man who sometimes turns up as "De Gibler," but who called himself "Major George Gordon De Luna Byron". It isn't hard to guess who he said his father was; his mother, he said, was a Portuguese countess secretly married to the poet during his early travels. After being educated in Switzerland, his account goes on, he set out on a great Byron pilgrimage visiting all the places associated with the poet. He first comes into view when he writes the publisher John Murray in 1843, asking for a Byron autograph. Soon afterwards he got possession of a mass of manuscripts, including genuine Byron material, which had been in the



possession of an obscure editor named John Wright. This gave him a working body of material for the exercise of his peculiar talents. Major Byron, as he called himself, was soon operating in Shelley, and offered to sell to Mrs. Shelley the letters of the poet which he said he had. At that time she was buying up all the Shelley letters she could get. The letters she bought from the Major, not fully identified, certainly included some forgeries. But this conjunction led the late Robert Metcalf Smith, in his book The Shelly Legend, to lay exaggerated emphasis on the degree of falsification thus introduced into Shelley biography.

Some other Shelley fabrications by Major Byron were put up for sale at Sotheby's. These were acquired by the publisher Moxon, a man with special knowledge of the subject, and brought out in 1852 with an introduction by Robert Browning. This is one of Browning's most important pieces of prose, and thus our forger after a fashion makes a place for himself in literary history. Shortly after the publication of this work it happened that Francis Turner Palgrave, the friend of Tennyson, best known for his famous little anthology The Golden Treasury, spotted in one of the alleged Shelley letters a passage lifted from an article in the Quarterly Review for 1840. Soon there was more evidence, and the book was withdrawn from circulation. Despite the spurious Shelley material, it is now much valued by Browning collectors.

The Major also continued to collect Byron and Keats, and the more he collected the more freely and ingeniously he could forge. In 1848 he began to feed Byron, Shelley, and Keats letters, a few at a time, to a bookseller named William White. White then sold the Byron material to John Murray of Albermarle Street, the son of Byron's correspondent and publisher. It may seem amazing that the knowledgeable Murray accepted forty-seven of the forged Byron letters as genuine for three years, that is, until the revelation of the 1852 Shelley forgeries. A close study of the Major's methods, however, lessens our astonishment. He had mastered his

subject. He knew all the printed Byron material, the works, correspondence, and biography, and he also had access to genuine unpublished letters, and could draw new and authentic detail from this material. In our academic phrase, Major Byron may be said to have majored in Byron and minored in Shelley and Keats. His expert knowledge would under more favorable circumstances have earned him a Ph.D. in English. Only rarely did he make up Byroniana out of whole cloth; he is responsible for some imitations of Byron's juvenile verse, and "A Version of Ossian's Address to the Sun," purporting to be inscribed in Byron's hand in a set of Ossian, landed in the Harvard College Library, and has been included in standard editions of Byron. But his usual procedure was to make skilful copies or patchwork combinations of genuine letters, using both manuscripts and books, so that we get a multiplication of letters which are in large part genuine as to text. It is extremely difficult to assemble all the evidence and thus trace the work of the forger step by step. There are still an undetermined number of forgeries in the standard editions of Byron. I should like to believe that there is no forgery which cannot be detected, but Major Byron's best or worst work puts this belief to the test. It may be added that Laurence Sterne's correspondence was manipulated and corrupted in somewhat the same way in the late eighteenth century.

Another episode stemming from the activities of Major Byron may be mentioned here because it serves to introduce our next eminent culprit, Thomas James Wise. In 1872 the publisher Richard Bentley acquired and undertook to publish a collection which was given the title Unpublished Letters of Lord Byron. While this was in the press, however, Bentley learned that at least nineteen of these letters were forgeries, probably from the Major's workshop. The edition was therefore destroyed, but ten copies survived, and one passed from H. Buxton Forman into the eager hands of Thomas J. Wise destined to become an eminent and indeed a notorious bibliographer. In the first volume of the famous catalogue of his Ashley Library, of which I shall say more

later, Wise took this group of letters very seriously, particularly a sequence dated from 1811 to 1817. He makes striking extracts from these letters: "I shall never marry you, for which you have reason to be thankful." Or again, "The child is dead, and I do not regret it, though a bastard Byron is better than no Byron." Wise then turned to the inevitable John Murray, who in guarded language told him the open secret of "De Gibler"; Wise, however, was not to be denied, and the spurious letters were quoted as late as his Bibliography of Byron (1928). A pretentious edition of this lot was brought out in 1930 by Covici-Friede in New York, edited by the late Walter Edwin Peck. By the time he wrote the last volume of the Ashley Library in 1936 Wise had evidently changed his mind and referred to the 1930 edition as "this sensational book." Yet he himself was ultimately responsible for it. It will be seen that preconceived ideas about Byron worked in exactly the opposite direction from preconceived ideas about Lincoln, but have had the same disastrous effect in securing the temporary acceptance of a palpable fraud.

The scandalous case of Thomas James Wise is the most spectacular in modern English bibliographical history, though not perhaps the most important in its effect on literary history itself. When the Wise scandal broke in 1934 it made the front page, and it was of particular interest to Texans because it was Wise who had assembled the famous Wrenn Collection at the University of Texas. Of course the Wise forgeries which I am about to describe make up only an infinitesimal part of the great Rare Book Collections at Austin, and may now be said to be themselves collector's items.

It is hard for us to realize the supreme position as a bibliographer and collector which Wise had attained in the first third of the twentieth century. He was a self-educated man who worked as clerk and then as partner in a firm which imported "essential oils." He was shrewd and aggressive, and in the course of innumerable experiences and contacts in the London booktrade became an almost unrivalled collector with a marvelously

retentive memory which gave him command of an immense amount of bibliographical detail and enabled him to draw many acute inferences. For many years Wise carried all before him. His career has been presented by Wilfred Partington in a biography originally called Forging Ahead, but in a revised edition toned down to Thomas J. Wise in the Original Cloth. In the 1920's he was President of the Bibliographical Society, was elected to that most exclusive bibliographical organization, the Roxburghe Club, was made an Honorary Fellow of Worcester College, Oxford, and received an honorary degree from Oxford in 1926. His own collection, known as the Ashley Library, had almost fabulous prestige. His findings were recorded in a long series of bibliographies of major authors -- Browning, Byron, Coleridge, Conrad, Dryden, Keats, Pope, Ruskin, Shelley, Wordsworth, and also in the monumental catalogue of the Ashley Library, eleven volumes, 1922-1936, each volume introduced by a prominent author or scholar. In his Introduction to Volume VII Dr. R. W. Chapman, a highly responsible Oxford scholar, says that an edition simply by virtue of being admitted to the Ashley Library is on its way to becoming a collector's book. Even the hostile biographer Partington says, "These works, with all their faults, are unmatched as the performance of one man: there is nothing like them for range of interest in the whole of the vast literature on literature." Wise, in short, had established himself as a bibliographical oracle. I will not go into the question of how many mistakes an oracle can make and still qualify. Wise was intensely concerned with matters which are the legitimate concern of both collectors and scholars, the detection of unique or rare variants and the establishment of the right chronological order among early issues. He was given to rather dogmatic pronouncements about firsts. In the complicated question of priority among the early issues of Pope's Dunciad, Wise picked one issue, the late Professor Griffith of Texas another. It has now turned out, not entirely to my surprise, that Griffith was right. But it was hard to go against Wise. His friend Edmund Gosse is reported to have said, "I am sure that on the Day of Judgment Wise will tell the good

Lord that Genesis is not the true first edition."

Wise was severe on bibliographical errors, and professed to be the ruthless enemy of forgers and fakers. There was supreme irony therefore in the revelation of 1934, when Carter and Pollard's Enquiry into the Nature of Certain Nineteenth-Century Pamphlets exposed Wise as an inveterate and daring typographical forger who had over a period of more than twenty years palmed off at least sixty fraudulent items upon the book-collecting world.

Wise developed a new mode of what we may call typographical forgery. He did not imitate a rare book. In fact we have his word for it that such imitation can never succeed. As he himself said, "Easy as it appears to fabricate reprints of rare books, it is in actual practice absolutely impossible to do so in such a manner that detection cannot follow the event. Even when the volume is of so recent a date that the necessary types and paper are both procurable, the human element fails, and . . . a blunder is committed in spite of the exercise of the most meticulous care." Wise avoided this difficulty by manufacturing phony first editions of works by nineteenth-century authors. He thus avoided the danger of inviting comparison with the genuine firsts. His fabricated issues were represented as private or pre-publication printings, supposedly limited to a few copies for distribution among the author's friends. Such a practice was not unknown in the nineteenth century, but by the time Wise had muddied the waters it appeared to be much more common than it really was. He would take a conveniently short piece by an important author -- these things are all pamphlets -- and have it printed privately, dating it earlier than any known edition. The imprint was necessarily false, and the whole transaction constitutes forgery, though the text itself is authentic. Fictitious imprints in themselves are fairly common, and may be fabricated for various reasons. When I find in a Restoration bibliography a bookseller with the name Tebroc, I infer that someone is having fun by spelling the bookseller Corbet's



name backwards. But Wise clearly intended to establish and market fake firsts. Carter and Pollard's technical proof was so convincing that it need not detain us; paper and type of the suspected pamphlets are of a kind not in use at the purported date; though the purported dates go back to 1847, none of these pamphlets appeared on the market before 1888; most of them had been "discovered" or circulated by Wise, and owe their reputation as collectors' items to him. A man named Gorfin, Wise's assistant, handled the pamphlets, but was clearly not the culprit. The pamphlets are from the press of Clay & Sons, whose accounts before 1911 were destroyed. Carter and Pollard could not therefore connect Wise explicitly with the printing, but said guardedly in 1934, with due respect to the strict British libel laws, "We find it difficult to believe that Mr. Wise cannot now guess the identity of the forger."

This exposé illustrates our point that the forger can usually get by only as long as he avoids intense scrutiny. Most of the pamphlets were of minor importance, but some were significant enough to attract attention and arouse suspicion. The most famous, comparable in appeal to the Lincoln-Rutledge letters, was the supposed first printing of Elizabeth Barrett Browning's Sonnets from the Portuguese, with the false imprint "Reading 1847". A first of these famous sonnets, addressed by Mrs. Browning to her husband and shown to him only after they were completed, would of course be a high spot for the nineteenth-century collector. Though the accounts of how Browning first came to see the sonnets are obscure, a letter from the Brownings to Leigh Hunt in 1849 is in itself enough to show that the date 1847 is impossible. Ironically this letter was in Wise's collection, and was published with his consent in an edition of Browning's letters brought out in 1933 by T. L. Hood. As early as 1898, Stevenson and Morris pamphlets had been questioned in the columns of the Athenaeum. In and after 1907 the monumental Cook-Wedderburn edition of Ruskin, in several short notes scattered through bulky volumes, showed up the Ruskin pamphlets. In 1910, in the eleventh edition of

the Britannica, Dr. Pollard of the British Museum said in the article on Bibliography: "The type-facsimile forgeries are mostly of short pieces by Tennyson, George Eliot, and A. C. Swinburne, printed (or supposed to have been printed -- for it is doubtful if some of these "forgeries" ever had any originals) for circulation among friends. These trifles should never be purchased without a written guarantee." Just who would furnish the guarantee is not quite clear. In the British Museum in 1910 it would have been possible to go farther; half of the Museum copies of the pamphlets had come from Wise himself. In 1920 and 1927 Mrs. Flora Livingston of the Widener Collection at Harvard questioned Wise's Swinburne and Kipling items. Her work was condemned by Wise as "hopelessly ill-informed and misleading". In the Wrenn-Wise correspondence, published from the files at the University of Texas and skilfully edited by Miss Ratchford, we get a wonderful picture of Wise in action, but the central mystery or paradox is not resolved. Why did he do it? He planted all his little forgeries in the Wrenn Collection, accompanied by what must be gratuitous little fibs as to how he happened to get them; but at the same time he was a brilliantly successful agent for Wrenn, acquiring bibliographical treasures at reasonable prices, and I mean reasonable by the standards of 1910, not 1967. I find no effort to charge his client whatever the traffic would bear, no obvious profiteering.

After Wise's death the British Museum was glad to acquire the Ashley Library for a figure not officially stated, but reported to be the very modest sum of £60,000. Yet even here there is a lingering bad taste, a last ugly revelation. The collection itself bears witness to Wise's nefarious activities. One of its great features is a magnificent lot of quartos of Elizabethan plays. It had long been known that Wise indulged in the practice of making up copies, that is, completing defective copies of rare books by transferring to them the required parts from other defective copies of the same books. It was also remarked when the Ashley Library came to the Museum that Wise's Elizabethan quartos were in superb condition, the Museum copies



often defective. This situation was at first supposed to illustrate the difference between a private and a public collection. But in 1956 it became known that, incredible as it may seem, Wise over a period of years had been in the habit of abstracting pages from the Museum quartos to improve or complete his own. In case after case individual leaves from the Museum copies have been found in the Ashley copies. Moreover, as has been fully demonstrated by the British bibliographer David Foxon, some of the Museum leaves are in the Wrenn Collection. We now have to think of the most eminent bibliographer in Great Britain, one of the privileged few who have had free access to the stacks of the British Museum, mutilating the precious volumes in the national collections to furnish forth his private library. This last phase takes us into what we may call the field of literary mayhem rather than forgery.

Literary forgery in the sense in which I am discussing it cannot be said to be much older than the middle of the eighteenth century. There are vast areas of skilful forgery and deliberate misrepresentation before this point, of course, but our kind of forgery cannot be said to exist before the development of a special interest in literary history and an accompanying interest in literary documentation. As long as scrutiny of an original document does not come into question, the field is open for the most varied kinds of mystification, some innocent and conventional, some malicious. One of the most persistent is the alleged source, which leads to the convention that the author is merely giving the documents he has found. This is so common I need hardly dwell upon it; it figures very prominently in the history of prose fiction. Someone says he has found a postbag full of letters, and here they are; or a pile of family papers has been entrusted to him. Horace Walpole, publishing his famous romance The Castle of Otranto (privately printed in 1764, published 1765) says, "The following work was found in the library of an ancient Catholic family in the north of England. It was printed at Naples, in the black-letter, in the year 1529". Perhaps, he says, it was written

earlier, nearer the events it recounts, between the eleventh and the thirteenth centuries. He has translated the Italian, but may be encouraged to publish the original. All this is but an innocent pretense which deceives no one; the whole performance gives an eighteenth-century view of the Middle Ages, and Walpole admitted his own authorship in 1766. Nevertheless the not very serious effort to establish a provenance is significant; new historical perspectives are opening up. Walpole's example may have encouraged the gifted boy from Bristol, Thomas Chatterton, to produce his Rowley poems -- verses attributed to a school of writers in fifteenth-century Bristol, really composed by Chatterton himself as a result of his studies, explorations, and reveries in the famous church of St. Mary Redcliffe. Walpole and his friends Mason and Gray soon pronounced Chatterton's specimens to be forgeries, and the young poet's career ended in suicide. Chatterton met disaster largely because attention was centered on his claims about Rowley in fifteenth-century Bristol rather than on the quality of the verse he had composed.

We find this double or shifting emphasis in the most important literary fabrication of the eighteenth century, James Macpherson's Ossian. Macpherson has been variously viewed as a shameless fabricator and hardened purveyor of fraud, or as a literary genius who made a profound impression on Western Europe, not merely on minor enthusiasts and dilettanti, but on Goethe and Napoleon and their great age. At any rate, for an obscure young schoolmaster in the Scottish Highlands he went far, illustrating Barrie's remark more than a century later that one of the most impressive sights in the world is a young Scotsman on the make. For a generation there had been a new interest in primitive poetry both for its supposed historical significance and its artistic value. People were vague about what it was -- something like Homer, something like the poetry of the Old Testament -- but they were sure that it was, in the words of a German enthusiast, "die Muttersprache des menschlichen Geschlechts" -- the primordial speech of the human race. Young Macpherson

encountered the Rev. John Home, who ten years before had led his friend the poet William Collins to write an "Ode on the Popular Superstitions of the Highlands of Scotland," expressing the current belief that the lays of runic bards might still be found among the Scottish mountains. Macpherson had only a slight smattering of Gaelic and of the traditional matter preserved in that difficult tongue, but achieved extraordinary success in producing, on however slender an historical basis, rhapsodical prose poems which seemed to his contemporaries to embody the very essence of an heroic, elegiac, and primitive past. In this whole complex the heroes of old, the bards who sang of them, and the genius of James Macpherson himself got, as Wordsworth says, "inveterately convolved". A keen critic like the poet Gray could say as soon as the Fragments appeared: "The whole external evidence would make one believe these fragments counterfeit, but the internal is so strong on the other side, that I am resolved to believe them genuine, spite of the Devil and the Kirk. In short this man is the very Daemon of poetry, or he has lighted on a treasure hid for ages." The success of the Fragments (1760) virtually required Macpherson to go to the Highlands and find the kind of primitive epic which he himself had postulated. His advisers, such as Professor Blair of Edinburgh, would be satisfied with nothing else. Hence followed Fingal (1762) and Temora (1763). The preface to Fingal promised originals; if he had been left to himself he would have been glad to drop the question of detailed documentation, but the pressure was too great for that. In a later preface he speaks of the author's style and the translator's style as if they were almost identical or at least interchangeable. The best modern criticism of Ossian dwells on the bardic role so congenial to Macpherson's age and lets the great historical pother go by default. But for generations this was impossible; Irish, Scottish, and English national prejudices were involved, and the question of authenticity was primary. On these terms Macpherson didn't have a chance. When, under pressure, he had to produce originals, he was apparently forced to vamp up a Gaelic text by translating his English back into Gaelic.

The later part of the eighteenth century likewise encouraged the fabrication or manipulation of ballad texts alleged to be "popular". Here there is no prominent forger playing a central part, and the question of validation based on original documents is not raised in acute form. There is no one authoritative text for a popular ballad; a good text is what good reciters and singers working in a good tradition (whatever that is) purvey. The only thing to do with good texts is to print them all, as Francis James Child did in his monumental edition of The English and Scottish Popular Ballads, which has a good claim to be the greatest work of literary scholarship yet produced on this continent. Singers and reciters modify the text, yet it is hard to distinguish between sound transmission and corruption here. The eighteenth-century ballad editor, from Bishop Percy to Walter Scott, manipulated his material; he revised it to meet the taste of his day, made it as interesting as possible, exercised such literary judgment and creative talent as he had. Reciters of ballads, when they found that collectors were interested, sometimes made their own contributions. Even eminent men sometimes slipped something in, or, if we like, put something over. Thus Professor Child admits the ballad "Kinmont Willie" to his collection, but says that it is under "vehement suspicion" of being by Walter Scott. Creative composition or fabrication? The nineteenth-century Scottish scholar Andrew Lang, a specialist in the Border ballads, illustrates in some comments on this subject the spirit that may inspire the ballad hoax. He happened to be working at Abbotsford when the ballad collections made by Scott for his Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border were being copied for Professor Child (long before typescript, photostat, or Xerox). Lang had written a couple of very good imitation Border ballads, and though he did not seriously consider the possibility at the time, he reflects that he might have had his own pieces copied on old paper in an old hand, and thrust into the mass of material. Only the transcription would have gone to Child. "Then we should have seen," says Lang, "whether or not Professor Child could have been taken in by a modern forgery."



Half a century before many a ballad collector might have actually carried out this little project, and the literary standards of 1800 would not have required that Lang should enlighten Child about his little hoax.

At this point let me repeat an obvious statement I made at the outset: the different instances of Walpole, Chatterton, Macpherson, and the ballad fabricators have this in common, that they produce an alleged text. Major Byron and Wise and their like are primarily concerned with the production of collateral evidence bearing on literary history and biography. It is this second kind that makes most of the trouble. The literary text may make only a nominal claim, and is to be judged by its intrinsic value. But the fake piece of evidence is not merely a harmless little fib; it obscures and distorts literary history. It is far worse than useless; it can have a great deal of nuisance value. It can set up a kind of running debate or controversy that may go on and on. When one of these false-alarm discussions gets started, and articles appear pro and con, one is tempted to remark with a British scholar, "It is painful to think that the time of skilled compositors should have been thus wasted."

According to the law of supply and demand the spurious evidence is likely to be produced just where the eagerness for evidence is most intense, but it has already been suggested that close scrutiny in such cases is likely to focus on the fraud and make detection more likely. In theory this would give Shakespearean forgery what we may call pride of place. In the period beginning in the later eighteenth century we have both kinds of forgery in this field, but the alleged Shakespearean pieces written and produced by young Ireland were exposed almost before they were brought on the stage. Shakespeare and other major authors have evidently never been as plausibly simulated, as Vermeer, I gather, has been amazingly simulated by the contemporary forger Van Meegeren. In the Shakespearean field we have most notably the production of false evidence

about Shakespeare and the drama of his time by that Satanically clever scholar John Payne Collier. Collier, steeped in the details of the period and with a truly masterly command of his subject, chose to manufacture the kind of evidence which the Elizabethan researcher would like to find and might hope to find if he were extremely lucky. He knew the actual nature and style of the records that have survived; he had mastered Elizabethan handwriting and diplomatics. He then proceeded to falsify certain records to such an extent that later scholars have been nervous about accepting his findings even when they may very well be authentic. He operated over a long period, and was brought to book only when he came forth with a copy of Shakespeare's Second Folio, richly annotated, indeed over-annotated, in his own fake Elizabethan hand. Collier's devious activities cannot be adequately illustrated here, and his motives, in the view of any practising scholar, must remain a horrid mystery. To take only one example, Egerton MS 2623, in the British Museum, contains a fragment of a late sixteenth-century play, in two hands, ending, "Nay my lord, Ile speake this much in his praise to his face, tho he bee as full a mastiue as ever ran vpon a gentleman: yet the curre is of a good breede, and to one he knows will shake his tayl." The last phrase was added by Collier as a fake allusion to Shakespeare, evidently modeled on the first known reference to Shakespeare as a dramatist, made by Robert Greene in 1592 by means of the hostile pun "Shakescene." Most if not all of the delusive material of this kind has been disposed of. But to illustrate how the forger can leave a trail of vague uncertainty and suspicion behind him, let us conclude with a brief comment on the case of Forman's Diary. In Ashmolean MS 208 at Oxford is a bulky diary kept by Simon Forman, a London physician contemporary with Shakespeare. This manuscript has long been known, but Collier was the first to point out that it contains records by Forman of the performance of three of Shakespeare's plays, Macbeth, Cymbeline, and The Winter's Tale at the Globe Theater in 1610 and 1611, together with a description of a Richard II play by Shakespeare, not the Richard II we

have. These entries are still accepted as contemporary evidence of the first importance; the Cymbeline and Winter's Tale entries are important for dating these plays, and the Macbeth passage regularly does duty as the only detailed contemporary account of the actual production of one of Shakespeare's plays. And yet, though scholars had long known of Ashmolean 208, and from the late seventeenth century were intensely curious about all matters connected with Shakespeare, no one had ever pointed out these references before Collier. Doubt has been unjustly cast upon them because of that simple fact, but despite recent suspicions they still stand. Collier is like the boy in the fable who cried "Wolf, wolf" too often. So it goes when once suspicion of a forger rears its ugly head.



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